

BBC →

11 11 11

BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION

CAVERSHAM PARK READING RG4 8TZ
TELEGRAMS AND CABLES MONITOR READING TELEX
TELEX 848318 TELEPHONE 0734 472742

30th October 1973

Dear Jerry,

Responsibilities and Susceptibilities

The point I was trying to make was that that old list of countries we agreed back in 1977 (no longer accurate, I'm afraid), which may have been a useful record of some kind and perhaps valuable in our negotiations with our paymasters, is crude in the extreme as a measure of our respective workloads since it gives no indication of the depth of coverage. We could both be in terrible trouble if anyone was to assume that we could provide 100% coverage of a great many countries on either side of the list. I am not prepared to accept - for either of us - that a failure to provide 100% coverage of a particular country is a failure to fulfil a responsibility. I don't think that was in our minds when we agreed the list and it should not now become an accepted doctrine between us. Hence my objection to it in the Minutes, which, on our side at any rate, are for internal consumption only.

I appreciate that your intention was the honourable one of seeking to bring pressure to bear upon the British Government to discharge its responsibilities by upping the budget, and I have certainly used the same argument myself - though without much success. But I think we have to be careful not to deceive them - or ourselves - by a false quantification of our respective contributions. The fact is that, despite severe financial problems, we have made considerable efforts this past year to step up our coverage of crisis areas on our side of the list, notably of Iran, Afghanistan and Southern Africa. It's not 100% perhaps, but it's a pretty substantial score and most of the significant reporting on these areas is coming from Caversham - as indeed it should. I therefore do not understand this to be any sort of failure to discharge a responsibility: rather the contrary.

There is perhaps a rather fundamental difference developing between our two organisations. Our consumers do not expect us to be the sole source of information about any particular area, nor do they expect that we should be able to provide 100% radio coverage in all circumstances. I imagine that they would consider it to be too expensive and indeed wasteful to fund us to do so. Nor do I see them, in our present economic condition, being very enthusiastic to spend substantial sums to be able to cover contingencies which, however possible, may actually never happen. It seems to me that perhaps your consumers do rather expect full coverage of any important crisis area and are prepared to spend money on contingencies like a breakdown of the central authority in Iran, or increasing disorder and Communist penetration of Southern Africa - both quite distinct possibilities. I guess it's a reflection of your country's role as the mainstay of the free world and our relative weakness.

/continued

CONFIDENTIAL

2.

Although the Thatcher Government professes to be keen to promote Britain's influence in the world, it seems that economic factors, at least unless and until her policies in that sphere bring about some sort of miracle, will work against her - and against us. For the next year or two anyway I think we will do very well to survive intact, but you can be sure that whatever we can do to sustain and even increase our contribution, we will.

John Rae



John Rae
Head of Monitoring Service

P.S. That Churchill speech. It was in fact made in the House of Commons and was not broadcast (though widely reported, of course). A careful check of BBC Archives provides no evidence to suggest that the BBC itself broadcast the speech either at home or overseas at, or around, the time it was made in June 1940. The original press report in this country makes it clear that the actor recorded the speech for the British Council and not for the BBC. I think we are in the clear!

Mr. Jerrold B. Brown,
Deputy Director,
Foreign Broadcast Information Service,
P.O. Box 2604,
Washington.
D.C. 20013.

apc